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Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Shimon Peres, calls on Syrian President to meet with Israeli Prime Minister; General Assembly also addressed by Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis; Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius and Jordan; yesterday Assembly was addressed by Jamaica, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon.

+ Secretary-General expresses shock over death of two staff members of the United Nations Children's Fund in Sudan.

+ Chairman of Special Committee against Apartheid welcomes release of 150 political prisoners following meeting between Nelson Mandela and South African President F.W. de Klerk.

+ Secretary-General's Special Representative for Angola says great majority of Angola's 4.86 million registered voters cast their votes in "peaceful and orderly" fashion.

+ Opportunities offered by aging populations stressed by Secretary-General on occasion of International Day of Elderly.

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In the General Assembly's debate this morning, Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister of Israel, called on the President of Syria to "set aside his reservations" and meet with the Prime Minister of Israel. "We have made clear to the Syrians that the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 contain a territorial dimension, combined with other components of peace and security which must be equally respected", he said.

For generations, he went on, the conflicts in the Middle East had been nurtured by global conflicts -- "by the Cold War and its hot competition" -- and the time was now upon the nations of the region to come to terms with the new realities, and to build a new Middle East of, by and for the people.

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Mr. Peres indicated that with the Jordanians, the solutions were awaiting the parties, and that common problems had to be faced, "including the possible Jordanian connection to Palestinian self-government and beyond".

With the Palestinian people, he went on saying, Israel had suggested an interim self-government arrangement, as conceived in Camp David. This proposal was imperfect in some respects, Mr. Peres said, but it offered the flexibility of an arrangement that would last no more than five years. During that period, Palestinians in the territories would enjoy self-government, and the opportunity to select, through democratic political elections, a Palestinian Administrative Council, enabling the Palestinian people to govern their own lives and to do so democratically.

With respect to Lebanon, Israel neither held territorial claims nor sought to influence the political destiny of that country, he said. "The moment Lebanon finds peace within itself and independence from outside intervention", he said, Lebanon and Israel will live in peace again.

The Israeli Foreign Minister also stressed that the poverty in the Middle East had to do with "the use and misuse of the available and potential resources in the region", and proposed that the essentially economic-oriented multilateral negotiations with his country's Arab neighbours in the fields of economics, arms control, refugees, ecology and water be changed - in order to be held in a coordinated manner, at the ministerial level, on a more frequent basis and with the participation of all States in the region.

Mr. Peres also reaffirmed Israel's position in favor of the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

Opening the General Assembly debate this morning, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, Mohamed Abderrahmane Ould Moïne, said elections and political pluralism in his country had been achieved in a gradual way to avoid sudden shocks and changes. Municipal elections had given the people experience in tolerance and cooperation. In July 1991, his country had voted to accept a new Constitution. It provided for a State of Law and protected individual rights. No political prisoners remained in his country.

Mr. Moïne went on to say that development was the greatest challenge now facing the international community, and dealing with its social aspect was indispensable. The projected world summit on social development was a means to address that issue, he said.

In his statement, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Géza Jeszenszky, said the key issue of stability and security in Central and Eastern Europe was the recognition and promotion of the endeavours of peoples towards self-determination, and of national minorities towards adequate forms of self-government. The endeavours towards self-determination, he said, constituted a first but apparently unavoidable step on their road back to Europe, towards their participation in a new, voluntary integration. However, it was a mistake for anyone to seek to achieve self-determination and

self-government by resurrecting the 19th-century concept of the nation-state, and a crime to advance it by redrawing frontiers by force or through "ethnic cleansing".

The brutality raging almost undisturbed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia was a telling signal that the world had not yet done everything possible to enforce, with all the means at its disposal, the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter.

Mr.Jeszenszky went on to say that public opinion in Hungary followed with deep concern the situation of the Hungarian minority in Serbian Vojvodina and other areas under Serbian control, where a Hungarian community of almost half a million were living in increasing danger and under threat. Serbian policy had not only chased tens of thousands of Hungarians from their ancestral homes, but was now intent on settling several thousand Serbian refugees in territories of Vojvodina and Slavonia inhabited by Hungarians and others, thereby forcibly changing the ethnic composition of whole areas.

Following a national agreement between the Government and all rebel movements - signed in the presence of representatives of all Africa and of representatives from countries around the world, there was a new hope in Mali, said Mohamed Alhousseini Touré, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali. The Government had launched an appeal to the international community to help Mali implement the various programmes to ensure peace and security, a vital condition for development, he said. The Mali of today respected human rights, promoted dialogue and rejected violence as a mode of expression. Neither the problems in the north of the country nor the current economic difficulties could restrain the good will and determination of Mali's people to achieve their country's development, said the Foreign Minister.

While politically, in the 1990s, he said, democracy had been embraced by many African countries, the economic situation there remained critical. Mr. Touré called for the international solidarity to help resolve the problems faced by the countries of the continent. Sufficient resources were needed to correct the imbalances and minimalize the negative effects of the adjustment of the most vulnerable, while permitting the financing of priority development South-South cooperation Programmes. Sub-regional economic integration, could help to overcome the difficulties currently seen in the North-South dialogue, he added.

Addressing the Assembly this morning, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of St. Kitts and Nevis, Kennedy A.Simmonds, recognized that the Caribbean people had to accept the principal responsibility for progress in their development.

Recalling that they had already demonstrated a commitment to reform and diversification by taking bold initiatives involving greater fiscal and economic discipline, he pointed out that they were willing to do more but could not "do the job alone" Significant progress had been made in regional

integration, he said, and the Caribbean community was now poised to take further initiatives to strenghten its functional, economic and political cooperation.

Turning to the environment issue, the Prime Minister explained that St.Kitts and Nevis had signed the Convention on Climate Change because the Island States of the region were more susceptible to the ravages of hurricanes and to the effects of sea-level rise. The importance of the marine environment to the health, welfare and total development ot the Caribbean people could not be over-emphasized, he said.

In his statement to the Assembly this afternoon, Paul Raymond Berenger, Minister of External Affairs of Mauritius, deplored the continued movement of highly dangerous nuclear material on land and on the high seas. His country had noted with grave concern the movement of plutonium and other toxic wastes across the world, he said. The Minister exhorted the countries involved in such trade to stop and heed the concerns voiced by the international community.

Turning to human rights questions, Mr. Berenger said it was a sad reflection on humanity that for months the world had remained impassive to the Somali human rights disaster. Promotion of human rights should remain high among the priorities of the internaticnal community, he said. He expressed Mauritius' full support for the idea that the General Assembly or the Security Council should be able to entrust the Secretary-General to mount fact-finding missions to territories where there were serious human rights abuses, either at the request of the Government or the appropriate organ of the United Nations.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Kamel Abu Jaber, told the Assembly that thanks to its policy of avoiding extremism and maintaining a middle and moderate course, Jordan had become an oasis of stability in a turbulent region where emotionalism, extremism, and ideological as well as physical violence were still dominant.

Jordan believed that peace was "an objective that our generation ought to pursue". The Palestinian question was a core concern to Jordan since it had "lived the tragedy of the Palestinian people" from the beginning, suffering most of its economic, social and political consequences with limited resources and means.

The Jordanian Minister noted that the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question had taken a positive turn, beginning with the Madrid Peace talks. However, he pointed out that "while the parties to the conflict were negotiating on the basis of international legality, Israel had continued its illegal practices", building new settlements and solidifying the existing ones. The Israeli Government's seemingly positive actions with regard to its policies in the occupied territories were inadequate, he said, and he called on Israel to commit itself to the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention by completely calling a halt to the building of all settlements.

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Turning to Iraq, the Foreign Minister said the suffering of the Iraqi people and the threat of dismemberment and instability - which were not intended by the Security Council resolutions - had made it imperative that Iraq be seen in a new light. It was in no one's interest that Iraq be partitioned or that its people continue to suffer, he said. Jordan was complying with Security Council resolutions and was looking forward to putting an end to the consequences of the Gulf crisis by peaceful means.

Pointing out that the right to development also implied the right to a healthy environment, and that Niger, a Sahelian country, was facing an increased desertification, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Niger, Hamidou Hassane Diallo, expressed last night his hope that the current Assembly session would define modalities for negotiation of an international convention on drought and desertification.

Niger, he went on to say, had embarked on the path to pluralistic democracy which respected human rights and guaranteed the exercise of civil rights. The process, he continued, began 11 month ago and was not without inherent difficulties. Asserting that on the eve on 1993, his country would revert to a full-fledged democratic regime, he insisted however that measures had to be taken by the United Nations to foster a new spirit of solidarity and justice among nations.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, Ike Omar S.Nwachukwu, informed the Assembly last night that his country, in January 1993, would complete its transition to democracy with the handing-over of power to an elected government.

Turning to the issue of the composition of the permanent membership of the Security Council, he pointed out that the parameters of democracy, size and role within the global system had become relevant criteria for adjucating the issue of representation.

Mr.Nwachukwu drew the Assembly's attention to the fact that Nigeria was the most populous African nation, with the largest economic potential and a proven commitment to the cause of world security, which gave Nigeria the qualification to fulfil Africa's aspiration to be represented in the permanent membership of the Security Council. At the same time, he added, the Secretary-General should ensure that Africans were adequately represented in the upper echelons of the Secretariat.

Jamaica's Prime Minister, Percival J. Patterson, called on the Assembly last night to support the creation of a new agenda which would provide the basic conditions for human survival everywhere.

Referring to the Haitian question, the Prime Minister asserted that the international community owed it to the people of Haiti and to itself to continue support for their cause and for a restoration of constitutional rule in that country. The repressive and illegal regime had continued to hold

power, one year after overthrowing the country's democratically elected leader. He urged the Assembly to lend its weight in support of one of its member States and of the legitimate Government and people of Haiti.

Most developing countries had embarked with determination on the difficult task of economic restructuring, which, in the short run, had imposed considerable hardships on all sectors of the population, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, Mr. Patterson said. He called for "a greatly increased flow of public and private financial resources" to alleviate those critical situations, saying that a transfer of relevant technology and a climate of international trade that rejected protectionism were necessary. A fair trading system was also required to encourage the development of regional integration processes among developing countries, to recognize their need for temporary preferential and protective measures and to promote the maximum openness in their economies, he said.

The members of the Economic Community of Central Africa were working towards measures for building confidence, security and development in the region, the Permanent Representative of Cameroon, Pascal Biloa Tang, told the Assembly last night. In conformity with the General Assembly's request, the Secretary-General had announced the creation of a permanent consultative committee on security questions in Central Africa. Last July, he continued, the 11 States of the sub-region had met in Yaoundé, under the auspices of the United Nations, to adopt the committee's programme of action, calling for the creation of a centre to train personnel in peace-keeping, the conclusion of a non-aggression pact and the creation of an inter-State general staff for crisis management.

Cameroon was proceeding on the path to democracy, he said, and was working to build a society that was both more democratic and respectful of human rights. Following elections whose tranparency had been guaranteed by international observers, Cameroon now had a multiparty Parliament and a coalition Government that was responsible to the Parliament. On 11 October, he said, there would be presidential elections.

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Upon receiving information confirming the death of two staff members of the United Nations Children's Fund in the Sudan, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today expressed shock over what he called the "senseless taking of human lives". According to a statement issued at Headquarters today, he said the incident was all the more shocking since the individuals were in the area as a part of the Operation Lifeline Sudan humanitarian relief effort, designed to alleviate the suffering of civilians affected by drought and civil conflict. He extended his deepest sympathy to the families of the victims.

The Secretary-General said in the statement that he considered the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) accountable for the deaths, since the relief staff were last seen in their costody. It was imperative, he said, that the parties involved take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of humanitarian relief workers.

UNICEF staff member, Myiny Maung of Myanmar, and a Norwegian free-lance journalist, Helge Hummelvoll, were killed in southern Sudan while on a mission visiting feeding centers in the Eastern Equatoria region. In addition, the United Nations has learned that the bodies of other members of the mission, a UNICEF staff driver, and a nurse with the non-governemental organization Interaid, had been recovered; however, positive identification had not yet been made.

As a result of the incidents, the Operation Lifeline Sudan personnel have been withdrawn from the area immediately pending assurances from the SPLA on the safety of relief personnel. However, other United Nations operations in southern Sudan are continuing.

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The Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid, Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), has welcomed the release of 150 political prisoners, immediately following the meeting of 26 September between Nelson Mandela and President F.W. de Klerk, and the South African Government's agreement to release the remaining political prisoners by 15 November.

In a statement issued today, Mr. Gambari noted that the continued detention or imprisonment of over 400 persons held for their political beliefs or activities, in spite of agreements reached last year for their release, had been one of the most serious obstacles to the process of peaceful change in South Africa.

The Chairman also felt "encouraged" by the agreement on a number of other issues reached by the two leaders, including those relating to the constitution-making process and to addressing the violence that had for too long allowed to jeopardize the peaceful process toward a new, non-racial and democratic South Africa. He appealed to all parties concerned to support the agreements reached so as to allow the negotiation process to resume.

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Margaret J. Anstee, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Angola, said today in Luanda after the close of voting, that the great majority of Angola's 4.86 million registered voters had cast their votes over the past two days "in conditions which can generally be described as peaceful and orderly".

The counting of the votes had just begun, she said, and the United Nations will have to await the National Electoral Council's formal announcement of the results. A review would then follow of the reports coming in from its observers all over the country on the manner in which the electoral process was conducted before the final verification could be made as to the freedom and the fairness of the elections.

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However, she said, it was not too soon to congratulate the Angolan people for having given a demonstration of civic responsibility and dignity worthy of emulation by any country in the world.

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The United Nations is marking today for the second time the International Day for the Elderly. In a statement issued on the occasion, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, while noting that the world's population was getting older, stressed the opportunities posed by aging populations.

Describing it as a quiet demographic revolution, he said the ageing of populations was affecting the social, economic and even political structures of societies. Only societies that successfully adjusted their policies and attitudes to integrate the growing numbers and proportions of older people could prosper, he said.

This year's observance of the International Day for the Elderly coincides with the preparations for a high-level international conference on aging to be held on 15 and 16 October as part of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

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